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THE ADMINISTRATION

The Lone American

Of all the Americans killed in the Viet Nam war, only two have been civilians. One was Barbara Robbins, a secretary who died in the terrorist bombing of the U.S. embassy in Saigon last month. The other was Joseph W. Grainger, 39, an employee of the Agency for International Development. Grainger was captured by a Viet Cong patrol last August. He was shot and killed in January. Only last week, after a laborious compilation of the evidence, were U.S. officials able to recount the last, desperate days of a lone American in an unforgiving land.

Grainger was a scholarly, quiet young man who had devoted his adult years to a search for some fulfilling engagement with life. He grew up in Meriden, Conn., joined the Army Air Forces after high school, later studied anthropology and sociology at Yale. He became a troop-ferrying pilot during the Korean War, then tried civilian life again. In 1958 he became a civilian historian for the Air Force, by 1964 had spent two years in South Viet Nam in that capacity.

Roadblocks. Though he had a wife and four children, Grainger was determined to do something more directly toward helping win the war: he got a job with AID and took an assignment in Phu Yen province, a hilly coastal area between Saigon and the North Viet Nam border. He was the only American in a region bristling with Viet Cong. In a short time, Grainger had begun to succeed in helping develop agricultural facilities, urban electrification, schools and health centers. "By the end of the summer," he wrote his mother and sister last May, "I hope to have 24-hour-a-day [electric] power. This will be an accomplishment for me. Tuy Hoa is the capital of the province and, therefore, must be the showplace. We can show the

people in the villages and hamlets what the government can do and will do for them. It is slow, but we are making headway, as the concepts are filtering out to the countryside."

On Saturday, Aug. 8, Grainger and two aides—a Vietnamese and a Filipino—set out in a pickup truck from Tuy Hoa to a sugar cane experimental station in Tan My, 21 miles away. Grainger was driving hard, since a leisurely pace on any road in that province is an invitation to attack. He passed two lightly manned government roadblocks, ignoring signals to turn back. At length he came to another roadblock, this one held by four Viet Cong. As Grainger tried to race through the block, a hand grenade landed in the road in front of the truck and exploded, shattering the back window. Cut by flying glass and shrapnel, Grainger slammed on the brakes, tried to turn the truck around. But blinded by his own blood, he backed up instead into a roadside canal. He and his companions broke free from the truck and swam to the far bank of the canal, only to fall into the hands of another Viet Cong patrol.

Escape? For four months, the three men, tightly bound, were paraded through villages and hamlets as living displays of "captured imperialist aggressors." On Dec. 26, after signing statements supporting the Viet Cong, Grainger's two companions were released. They reported that the American was still in captivity, chained and guarded in a remote cave. He was in good health, they said; the Viet Cong had fed them well and had scrupulously deducted the cost of their food from the money taken from them.

Grainger, meanwhile, had learned of the release of the two men and now demanded his own freedom. When the Viet Cong refused, Grainger went on a five-day hunger strike. That was around Jan. 1. Five days later—how it happened nobody knows—Grainger managed to slip his chains and escape.

For seven days, the Viet Cong stalked him in the jungles, but Grainger hid in a marsh. Then, on Jan. 12, the Communists, drawn to the vicinity by the sounds of water buffaloes snorting nervously, found him. Grainger was standing by a small stream, clad only in his shorts. He was washing the mud from his clothes. The soldiers ordered him to surrender, but he tried to run, and a soldier named Hai downed him with a single shot. He was carried to a nearby hamlet, where after five hours without medical aid he died.



JOSEPH GRAINGER

In an unforgiving land.